



National Guard Association of Connecticut

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Testimony in Favor of Raised Bills 210, 211, 212, 5259, 5260, 5261 and 5262

Good morning Sen. Maynard, Rep. Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs and thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of several important proposals before you today. My name is Debbi Newton and I am the Legislative Chair for the National Guard Association of Connecticut. I have served in that capacity for the past seven years and am a 30-year member of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

Let me first start by addressing **Raised Bill 215, An Act Concerning Tuition Waivers for Veterans**. Frankly, I'm not sure where I or NGACT stand on this bill. At first glance, it appears to be a good bill, but upon second glance I have some concerns that taken in conjunction with other proposals I've seen during the past couple of years and that I'm sure will surface again, this bill will have a negative effect on some of your National Guardsmen and actually take away some of their benefits instead of protecting, enhancing or improving them. This is a bill we will need to look at in depth before we can take a more definitive stand on it. Please understand that we have nothing against expanding the pool of eligible service members, just that we do not want that to happen at the expense of your state Guardsmen and women.

Raised Bill 210, An Act Concerning Property Tax Exemptions for One Hundred Percent Disabled Veterans is a bill NGACT supports. Disabled Veterans have served their country well and deserve whatever financial breaks they can get. Many times they are unable to work because of their disabilities and having this property tax exemption could mean the difference in them owning a car, or even being able to keep their homes.

NGACT fully supports **Raised Bill 211, An Act Concerning Criminal Cases of Persons Who Have Returned from Service with the Armed Forces**. We have all heard the stories of Soldiers and other Servicemembers who return from their deployments with PTSD or other issues to deal with. Many turn to drugs and alcohol either to forget, or to get that adrenaline rush they feel they are missing from combat. They drive drunk, they drive recklessly, they make stupid mistakes. Giving the courts the ability to have a separate docket to handle such cases can, and in fact does, help our Servicemembers by recognizing their special needs and often providing them the substance abuse counseling and treatment the need and helps them much more than incarcerating them or giving them a criminal record ever could. Having a criminal record could get these Veterans

discharged from the military when receiving treatment could save them and make them good, productive Soldiers again. They need to know that we care and stand by them, not that we will punish them when they need help. Recognizing this could also go a long way in encouraging those that do need help to ask for it before they ever do anything that would put them into the courts in the first place. That is a level of support our state has a responsibility to show our Veterans.

Raised Bill 212, ACC the Motor Vehicle Tax Exemption for Members of the Armed Forces and Raised Bill 5261, ACC False Representation of Military Status both are simply language changes to existing Statutes that clarify the intent of both and have NGACTION's support.

Raised Bill 5259, ACC the Military Facility Construction or Acquisition Program is much the same in that it contains language changes that brings outdated terms in line with language and terms widely used and recognized today.

NGACTION also fully supports **Raised Bill 5260, An Act Establishing Connecticut National Guard Training Accounts.**

Finally, **Raised Bill 5262, ACC Death Certificate Fees for Veterans** is another bill NGACTION fully supports. At a time when families are grieving, it would be a small comfort to know that they do not have to pay a fee for a death certificate when they are struggling just to cope and keep their heads above emotional waters. Death certificates are needed for nearly everything families have to do after their loved one dies, from hiring a funeral home to filing life insurance and death benefit claims. Not having families pay for death certificates is one very small way the state can thank the family for their loved one's service to this state and country and to thank them for their sacrifices.

Thank you for the opportunity to once again come before you on behalf of my fellow Guardsmen, Veterans, Retirees and their families. And thank you for all you do for them, I know it, and this committee, is appreciated, even though you probably don't hear it often enough. Again, thank you and I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Debbi Newton



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